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AUTHOR Atmore, Eric
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ABSTRACT

In May 1990 the Minister of National Education announced an Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) for education in South Africa, developed in conjunction with other governmental departments, to seek short- and medium-term managerial solutions for some of the nation's most pressing educational needs. The ERS advances five major policy recommendations for a future education model: (1) race should not be a factor and equal opportunity should be assured; (2) national unity should be promoted while respect for diversity is ensured; (3) a balance between national regulation and local autonomy should be maintained; (4) the future constitution of South Africa should allow for a decentralized education system unified at the national level, with accountability at both levels; and (5) responsibility for the new model should be shared by national and local government, teacher organizations, parent groups, and other interested parties. In the specific area of early childhood educare, the ERS recommends that distance education should be encouraged through the funding of suitable preschool television and radio programs and the development of instructional video programs to train adults to assist in the early childhood learning environment. It also recommends that a bridge program be developed for children not yet ready for the first year of schooling. (MDM)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCARE POLICY: WHAT DOES THE EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL STRATEGY (ERS) SUGGEST ?

by

ERIC ATMORE

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A NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY INVESTIGATION (NEPI) PAPER

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCARE POLICY: WHAT DOES THE EDUCATION RENEWAL STRATEGY (ERS) SUGGEST?

In May 1990 the Minister of National Education announced the development of an Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) for education in South Africa. This was developed in conjunction with the Ministers of departments of State responsible for education and was carried out under the auspices of the Committee of Heads of Education Departments. The intention was to seek short and medium term managerial solutions for some of the most pressing problems in education.

It was expected that solutions would be found through which the education system would be acceptable to the majority of South Africans and would "enjoy their understanding and support".

The Education Model

In evaluating the present education model the following eleven principles for education, amongst others, were used:

* Equal opportunities
* A balance of commonality and diversity
* Freedom of choice
* Relevance
* Linkage between formal and non-formal education
* State and parental responsibilities for formal education
* State and private sector responsibilities for non-formal education
* State support for private education
* Balance between administrative centralisation and decentralisation
* Professional status of educators
* Continuing research

In general it was found that the present education model does not measure up to this set of principles.

Major recommendations of the ERS

The five major recommendations of the ERS are that:

(i) **RACE SHOULD NOT FEATURE IN STRUCTURING THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION IN A FUTURE EDUCATION MODEL FOR SOUTH AFRICA AND JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES MUST BE ENSURED.**

(ii) THE NEW EDUCATION MODEL MUST VISIBLY PROMOTE AND EXPRESS NATIONAL UNITY. HOWEVER, IN THIS REGARD IT IS ACCEPTED THAT FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION MUST FORM A CORNERSTONE OF A NEW EDUCATION MODEL. IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT THAT ADEQUATE AND SATISFACTORY ALLOWANCE BE MADE FOR THE ACCOMODATION OF DIVERSITY (SUCH AS LANGUAGE, RELIGION OR CULTURE.)

(iii) THE NEW EDUCATION MODEL MUST PROVIDE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF A CENTRAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY AS WELL AS DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION. THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY MUST HAVE THE RESPONSIBLITY FOR POLICY ON NORMS AND STANDARDS IN VARIOUS CRUCIAL MATTERS IN EDUCATION; AND HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CATEGORIES OF INSTITUTIONS OF A MORE NATIONAL CHARACTER WHICH ENJOY A VERY LARGE DEGREE OF AUTONOMY. OTHER FUNCTIONS RELATING TO EDUCATION FALL UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS, PROVIDED THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF MAXIMUM DEVOLUTION OF POWER TO THE COMMUNITY OR INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION IS UPHELD THROUGHOUT.

IN KEEPING WITH THIS LAST-MENTIONED PRINCIPLE IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF SCHOOLS BE ESTABLISHED AND THE FUNDING BE HANDLED ACCORDINGLY, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE SCHOOLS NOT BEING DIFFERENT FUNDING LEVELS BUT, FOR EXAMPLE, DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS OF MANAGEMENT AUTONOMY SUCH AN APPROACH WILL ALSO PROVIDE FOR THE NATURAL ACCOMODATION OF DIVERSITY, IF SUCH A NEED EXISTS. FURTHERMORE, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT SCHOOLS THAT WISH TO CO-OPERATE IN THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION BY, FOR EXAMPLE, SHARING RESOURCES COULD, WITHOUT INHIBITING NATIONAL UNITY, ORGANISE THEMSELVES INTO SOME KIND OF REGIONAL, DEVELOPMENTAL OR VALUE-CENTRED ORGANISATIONAL GROUPING.

(iv) THE FUTURE CONSTITUTION ALLOW FOR A DECENTRALISED SYSTEM UNIFIED BY CO-ORDINATING STRUCTURES ON THE CENTRAL LEVEL. IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED THAT POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABLILITY FOR EDUCATION IS ESTABLISHED AT BOTH LEVELS FOR EDUCATION.

(v) THE NEW EDUCATION MODEL MUST PROVIDE FOR THE SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING EDUCATION BETWEEN POLITICAL AUTHORITIES AT VARIOUS LEVELS AND DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS, PARENT COMMUNITIES AND THE ORGANISED TEACHING PROFESSION TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL LEARNERS.

Early Childhood Educare

Two sections of the ERS relate to early childhood educare

(a) Distance education and other forms of tuition

Distance education is seen as an alternative, and possibly cheaper, way of providing education. As far as distance education is concerned, various prospective target groups are identified. This includes pre-school learners . Children of pre-school age were identified as a target group for whom distance education could yield appreciable results. A substantial investment in this area is universally recognised as leading to enhanced school readiness, especially in disadvantaged groups, thereby reducing drop-out rates in later school years. TV programmes such as the USA's "Reading Rainbow", "Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood" and "Sesame Street" are examples recommended for emulating.

Table 1 below indicates the recommended appropriate distance teaching medium for preschool children

TABLE 1: TARGET GROUPS AND APPROPRIATE DISTANCE TEACHING MEDIUM

TARGET GROUP	CIRCUM-STANCES	EXTENT	APPLICABLE DISTANCE TEACHING MEDIUM AS: ALTERNATIVE	SUPPLEMENTARY	SUPPORTIVE
Preschool Children	A	R	A V	A V	A V
	B	R	A V	A V	A V
	C	L	A	A	A

Circumstances A- More advantaged groups
B- Middle class groups
C- Disadvantaged groups

Extent: S- Small Number
R- Reasonable No.
L- Large Number

Medium
P- Printed text
A- Audio cassette/radio
V- Video cassette/TV
C- Computer aided

THE ERS RECOMMENDS THAT:

(i) THE PRIVATE SECTOR (THROUGH BODIES SUCH AS PRISEC), AND ESPECIALLY THOSE EMPLOYERS PROVIDING PRE-SCHOOL FACILITIES FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES, TOGETHER WITH NATIONAL PRE-SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS, TAKE THE LEAD IN REQUESTING THE SABC TO MANUFACTURE OR OBTAIN RIGHTS TO SUITABLE PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMMES AND TO TRANSMIT SUCH TV PROGRAMMES OR APPROPRIATE RADIO PROGRAMMES IN SUITABLE TIME-SLOTS; AND

(ii) SUITABLE PROGRAMMES IN MODULE FORM SHOULD BE DEVELOPED FOR THE TRAINING OF ADULTS, AND NOT NECESSARILY TEACHERS TO GUIDE CHILDREN IN THE PRE-PRIMARY LEARNING SITUATION.

(b) Pre-primary education

The ERS states that although some education departments are involved in providing pre-primary education most departments have had to scale down their activities in this sphere owing to severe budget restrictions. Furthermore, no general policy for this type of education exists at present, each education department determining its own approach to pre-primary education. This approach is based on a decision taken by Education Ministers in 1987 that general policy for ordinary school education should first be determined in its various facets, after which policy for pre-primary education could be considered.

The Education Ministers also decided in 1987 that learners in their first school year who showed that they were not yet sufficiently school ready should enjoy the benefit of a special bridging programme during that year. Depending on their progress in the bridging programme, they could rejoin the ordinary school programme during their first or second school year or repeat their first school year.Such programmes have been introduced with some success in some schools and are being developed further.

The major part of pre-primary education is thus conducted in the form of non-formal education, usually with some links (such as registration or receiving small subsidies) to the formal education sector. The value of pre-primary education in improving performance in the ordinary school is universally acknowledged. This is the case particularly with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who frequently are not school ready when reaching school-going age. The result is usually manifested in high drop-out rates during later school years.

THE ERS RECOMMENDS THAT:

THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION DEVELOP A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION. IT SHOULD PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE POSSIBLITY OF UTILISING WHAT IS NOW THE FIRST SCHOOL YEAR AS A BRIDGING YEAR AND THE INTEGRATION THEREOF WITH THE FIRST SCHOOL PHASE OF SEVEN YEARS.

The ERS concludes by stating that an investment in education is without any doubt, the most important investment any nation can make for its future. Following up the various proposals in a concerted manner and involving all stakeholders in education will lead to a leaner but fitter education system. It is of the utmost importance that in establishing such an education system there will be no compromise whatever regarding education standards. In this way all learners will share in the same opportunities to be adequately equipped to contribute positively towards establishing a new society in South Africa.

Reference

Department of National Education
1991

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Discussion Document
Department of National
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Pretoria.